

ESTHER'S EXALTATION OR, WHO KNOWS?

NO. 1777

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 27, 1884,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
Esther 4:13-14.

THE appeal of Mordecai in his pressing time of distress was to one single person, namely, to Esther. I believe that I shall do better this morning by making my sermon an address to individuals than by speaking of nations or churches. I assuredly believe that England has been raised up as a nation and brought to her present unique position that she may be the means of spreading the Gospel throughout all the nations of the earth. I judge that God has blessed the two great nations of the Anglo-Saxon race—England and the United States—and given them pre-eminence in commerce and in liberty on purpose that in such a time as this they may spread abroad the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Woe to these nations if they fail to fulfill their solemn obligations! If, being raised up for a purpose, they refuse to perform it, they shall melt away. If, being armed and carrying bows, they turn back in the day of battle, both empires will perish as surely as did the power of Macedon and the dominion of Rome. We ought to be very careful as a people to act upon the rule of righteousness and the principles of peace, for any other conduct is inconsistent with our high calling. We are entrusted with great opportunities, if we do not rightly use them the New Zealander of Macaulay may yet survey the ruins of this empire city. "Thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed," said Mordecai to Esther, and he says the same to us. Oh, that England may know the day of her visitation.

We might properly say of any Christian church that it has its own appointed place in the purposes of divine mercy. If the candle is lighted, even though it be set upon a golden candlestick, it is not lighted for itself, but that it may give light to all that are in the house. If any church fails to bless others, and so proves unfaithful to her solemn trust, the Lord will take away the candlestick out of its place, and leave the unfaithful to mourn in darkness. Remember the Lord's warning voice, "Go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel."

Remember, also, unfaithful Jerusalem, whose house is left unto her desolate because she obeyed not the voice of the Lord. The church in Rome was once a church of high commanding influence for good, you know what it has become. Some other churches are on the way, I fear, to the same dreadful end. God grant that none of the churches with which we are connected as Christian people may ever either apostatize from the faith, or grow lax and worldly, or become indifferent to the glory of God and the salvation of men. I might thus speak to each church and say, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

My brethren, it is a wonderfully easy thing to denounce the faults of a government or of a nation, to complain of this being done, and of that being left undone, and this amusement may only serve to divert our conscience from its more profitable duties at home. But consider the matter, and remember that in a free state we each one are part and parcel of the nation, and of the government, and we are each one personally responsible in our measure and degree for all the acts of the nation. It is an easy matter to tie

up our country to the halberds like a criminal and then to scourge it without mercy, it would be a far more profitable business to use the whip of criticism upon ourselves.

The same is true with regard to a church. Men are too apt to condemn in the mass what they tolerate in themselves as individuals. But why are we so ready to accuse the churches? Why are we so censorious as to what the churches do, and what the churches are? Who make up the churches? Why, we each one by our influence help to make the churches good, or bad, or indifferent, as the case may be.

Therefore, I will not waste time in generalities, but I will come to personalities. I will follow Mordecai's tack, and speak only to Esther, that is to say, to each one who may happen to be here to whom God has entrusted opportunity, talent, and position, I would urge them to remember that there is a something for each believer to do, a work which he cannot delegate to another, a task which it is his privilege to be permitted to undertake, which it will be to his solemn disgrace and detriment if he does not execute, but which will be to his eternal glory under God if he be found faithful in it. The Gospel assures us that the great householder has committed talents "to every man according to his several ability." Our hope of success this morning in our sermon shall lie in your individualizing yourselves and hearing the voice of the Spirit of God, saying to each one, "Who knoweth whether *thou* art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

I shall lay out my sermon in four parcels, arranging it under four words.

I. The first word is HEARKEN!

Hearken to my word, as Mordecai desired Esther to hearken to him. Hearken while God the Lord speaks to your heart, and calls you to your high vocation.

Hearken, first, to a question. Brother, *will you separate your interests from those of your people and your God?* I do not think that Mordecai was afraid that Esther would do so, but still it is sometimes as well to prevent an evil before we perceive it, and he did so by saying, "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house." It was possible that being a queen it might enter into her mind that she would be safe even if all the rest of the Jews were put to death.

It would be a painful thing that her countrymen should be destroyed, but still the stroke might not touch her in the seclusion of the palace, where she had "not yet showed her kindred nor her people." She would still remain the favored wife of the great king, and she might, therefore, selfishly look to herself, and leave those who were in peril to look to themselves or to their God, while she coldly hoped that the Lord would somehow or other give them deliverance.

Does that temptation come across the path of any one of us? It may. You may say, "I shall be saved though the city should perish in its iniquity. Though the people are steeped in poverty and ignorance, I shall enjoy plenty and live in light. I know the Lord myself, and that is my main concern, if the heathen perish I am not one of them, and I am thankful that it will not interfere with my destiny." Will you argue in this selfish manner? Will you follow the wicked policy of separating your own personal interests from those of your Redeemer and His church? If so your ship is wrecked before it leaves the harbor. You are no child of God if this principle holds the mastery over you.

Your salvation lies not in your separation from Christ and His church, but in your union with them. Over the sea of life there is no passing in safety but in the vessel which carries your Lord and His disciples. Are you going to sail in a separate boat, or will you try to swim across the sea in your own strength? Then look to yourself, and expect disaster. If your interests and Christ's are to be separated you must supply yourself with atonement, with righteousness, with spiritual life, and with heavenly food, yea, you must make a heaven for yourself. You cannot do this, and therefore it would be your ruin to attempt to stand alone.

Do you wish to be joined with Jesus so as to be rescued from hell? I tell you, sirs, there is no receiving Christ unless you receive His doctrine and rule. You must receive this grace also, namely, that you give yourself to Him to make His interests your interests, His life your life, His kingdom your kingdom, His glory your glory. Your personal welfare will be found in submergence into Christ. Sink or swim with your Lord and His cause. Do you mean to separate yourself from the church of God, and say,

"I shall look to my own salvation, but I cannot be supposed to take an interest in saving others"? In such a spirit as that I do not say you *will* be lost, but I say you *are* lost already. It is as needful that you be saved from selfishness as from any other vice.

Some of our worst fetters are those which are forged by selfishness, and this is one of the chief bonds which our Redeemer must burst for us. We must live unto God and love others as God has loved us, or else we are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I conceive that nobody who professes to be a Christian would deliberately wish to set up a private estate apart from Christ and His cause. Then if you are partners in name, be partners in fact. If you have fellowship with Christ—remember that it is of the essence of fellowship that you are in co-partnership with Him, if He is a loser, you are a loser, and you are to fret about it, and if He is a gainer, you are a gainer, and you are to joy therein.

He bids you rejoice with Him that He has found His sheep that was lost. I ask again—Are you determined to set up a separate interest from Christ? If you are, say so deliberately and count the cost. Mark that man, for though he may in his selfishness spread himself abroad and flourish like a green bay tree, yet the day shall come when he shall wither, and the place that knows him shall know him no more forever.

O professed servant of God, minister, deacon, or private church member, you shall perish if once you begin to live unto yourself. Remember that word, you careless women, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth," and hearken, you selfish religionists, to this truth, "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die."

Hearken to a second question. *If you could separate your interests from those of the cause of God, would you thereby secure them?* You are a church member, you think also that you are a living member of the body of Christ, and you are tempted to look to yourself and to leave others to their shifts. Hearken—"Think not with thyself that thou wilt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." Is it so, that because you are yourself a member of a flourishing church, and because you enjoy all sorts of Christian privileges, you therefore harden your heart concerning dying churches and desponding saints? Do you imagine that the body can be sick, and yet you as a member of it will not suffer? I tell you, if the church of God goes aside it will be to your injury, if the truth of God be not preached you will be a loser, if Christian life be not vigorous you will be weakened.

When a baneful atmosphere is over other Christians you will breathe it. Sinners cannot be left in their spiritual death without creating foulness in the air which is to the peril of us all. If this great city is left to seethe and rot in its infidelity and misery and filthiness, fancy not that you Christian people will escape. You dwell with these outcasts, and you are already feeling their influence, and will feel it still more if they do not feel yours. How far and how deep that participation will go I will not venture to prophesy, for I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet, but there are elements now fermenting which threaten, first, the existence of the commonwealth, and next, the liberties of Christian worship.

Take you good heed, my brethren, things cannot long remain as they are. This great flood of wretchedness must be assuaged, or it will sweep us all away. I know not what of evil may yet come of the negligence of the Christian church towards the population with which it is surrounded. Those wretched beings who starve in overcrowded rooms will not die unavenged if nothing more comes of it than the sin which is begotten of want. If you live in a house well-ventilated, and well-drained, and you have near your hovels foul, filthy, dilapidated, overcrowded, when the fever breeds there it will not respect your garden wall, it will come up into your windows, strike down your children, or lay you yourself in the grave.

As such mischief to health cannot be confined to the locality in which it was born, so is it with spiritual and moral disease, it must and will spread on all sides. This may be a selfish argument, but as we are battling with selfishness, we may fitly take Goliath's sword with which to cut off his head. You Christian people suffer if the church suffers, you suffer even if the world suffers. If you are not creating holy warmth, the chill of sin is freezing you. Unconsciously the death which is all around will creep over

you who are idle in the church, and it will soon paralyze all your energies unless in the name of God you arouse yourselves to give battle to it. You must unite with the Lord and His people in winning the victory over sin, or sin will win the victory over you. Hearken to this, and let it sink into your mind.

Next, remember, for your humiliation, that *God can do without you*. Enlargement and deliverance will arise to His people from another place if it comes not by us. If the Lord were tied up to any one man, or any one church, or any one nation, it were treasonable for that person, church, or nation to be negligent, but as the Lord waits not for man, neither tarries for the sons of men, it becomes them to mind what they are at. He can do without *us*. When He looked and there was no man, His own arm brought salvation, and as it was of old so will it be again. Mark you that. The great owner of the vineyard will have fruit at the end of the year, and if yonder tree does not bear it, He will cut it down, why cumberst it the ground?

If the husbandmen consult their own gain, and plot to gain the inheritance for themselves, their Lord will destroy them, "and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." He will effect His purpose, He will fetch home His banished, He will gather together His scattered sheep, He will cause the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and if we do not gather in the wanderers, or spread the knowledge of His grace, the work will be done by more faithful men.

The Spirit says unto the church in Philadelphia, "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The crown of this church has been soul-winning, suffer none to rob you of it. If any one of you has already gained the high honor of bringing sinners to Christ, do not lose it by a future life of sloth or powerlessness. Hold fast your zeal and perseverance, that you may be rewarded at the last day.

He can do without you, recollect that, O servant of the Lord! We are apt to think ourselves wonderfully important, and begin to fret if we are put aside from our work for a little, but perhaps this affliction is necessary to teach us and to teach all that know us to cease from man and to look to God alone. It would be a sad thing to exhibit pride and self-conceit, and provoke the Lord to show the world how readily He can dispense with our labors. With this truth in view my heart cries—

*"Dismiss me not from Thy service, Lord,
But train me for Thy will."*

Here follows a still more sobering reflection. Recollect that as God can do without us, *it may be He will do without us*. It might come to pass that God would say, "I will no more bless the world by this England, she has become selfishly mercantile, she cares more for commerce than for righteousness, she is drunk and infidel, I will give her up. Her merchants care nothing for the poor, whose labor is ill-requited, let her pass away as all oppressors must, and let the nations say—'Alas, alas, that great city, that mighty city! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought.'" He may say to any church, "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." "Ichabod" has been written aforetime, and may be again, on places where once there shone upon the forefront the inscription—"HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD."

So also any man may be set aside, even as the Lord put away Saul, and said to him, "Thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." Though, like Samson, a hero may have slain his thousands, and the hopes of Israel hang upon the hero, yet shorn and blinded he may yet grind with slaves at the mill if his lusts enslave him. The Lord may decline to use us if we are not prepared in such a time as this to do our very utmost, and to lay ourselves out for the cause of truth and holiness.

It may please the Lord to say of a wicked and slothful servant, "Take away his talent from him and give it to him that has ten talents." He may say to any pastor among us, "Let his habitation be desolate, and his bishopric let another take." Hearken, I pray you, to this warning from the Lord. Hear, O heaven,

and give ear, O earth, for the Lord will judge His people, and to whom much is given of him shall much be required.

Hearken to yet one thing more. *How will you bear the disgrace, if ever it comes upon you, of having suffered your golden opportunities to be wasted?* What if Israel had been destroyed for lack of Esther's intercession? Her name would have been a byword among other nations as a base and traitorous woman. If the people had been spared by some other means, and she had refused her mission, as long as there lived a Jew they would have kept no feast of Purim, but have cursed her memory.

When I think of the neglects of our own ancestors I am anxious that we take warning by them. There are at this moment straths in the Highlands which are thoroughly Romish. Why? They were not carefully evangelized at the time of the Reformation. If the workers of that period had done their work thoroughly there would have been no Romish valleys in Presbyterian Scotland. Ireland still cowers under the shadow of the Pope, there was a hopeful time when better things were promised, but this was allowed to pass by, and what can be done to rescue Ireland now?

Times do not tarry, and tides do not wait, and if we do not avail ourselves of them while they are with us, our descendants may lament our neglects. I fear that the best among us can recollect with regret times which we have suffered to pass over us unimproved. We can never call them back again. You did not train your children, they are men and women now, and will not listen to you. Oh, parents, why did you not speak to them when they would have listened?

But what if a whole life should glide away in living for yourselves, in living for your own comfort and enriching? What if you have done nothing in all these years for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the coming of His kingdom? What disgrace awaits the unfaithful servant! What dishonor awaits *you!* If you have been clouds without rain, wells without water, smoking lamps giving no light, fields that yield no harvest, what must be your portion? Let every Esther resolve that she will never bring this ban upon her name, let every man, woman, and even child among us, knowing the Lord, feel that the vows of the Lord are upon us, and that by imperative necessity we must serve according to our capacity the cause of God and truth. If we even perish through our zeal for the Lord of hosts it will be grand thus to lose our lives. Thus much for the word "Hearken." May the Spirit of God sanctify your hearts by His word.

II. I change a little, and the call is now "CONSIDER."

Consider to what some of you have been advanced. You have been raised to salvation. You have been lifted from the dunghill and set among princes. I have uttered the word "salvation," but what infinity of goodness lies hidden there! In the music of that word all sweetnesses meet together. What are the obligations of one elected according to the foreknowledge of God, redeemed by the heart's blood of Christ, and quickened by the Holy Ghost? What manner of persons ought we to be? You have been raised to that honor, walk worthy of it.

Besides that, some of you have been raised to a considerable degree of Christian knowledge—you are not mere babes in grace, you are well instructed, and you have had a blessed experience both of trouble and of joy, which has made you strong in the Lord, and has confirmed you in the faith, and has admitted you into the inner circle where the joy of the Lord is best known. If I had said that you had been elevated to be queens, like Esther, it would have been a poor elevation compared with that which you have actually received. Some of you who are the favorites of heaven have leaned your head on Christ's bosom, and have been permitted to sit where angels would wish to be, you are near and dear to Jesus, and espoused to Him in love.

In addition to all this, the Lord has raised some of you out of poverty and brought you to comparative wealth, perhaps to positive wealth, and He has given you positions which once you never dreamed of. To this He adds domestic comfort, and health, and prosperity in all its forms. The Lord has also given you talent. I fear we have all of us more ability than we use—but some have more talent than they themselves are aware of, and this perhaps they display in business, but never in the cause of God.

Thus you are brought to the kingdom, but why is it so? I want you to consider *why the Lord has brought you where you are.* Do you think that He has done it for your own sake? Does He intend all this

merely that you may practice self-indulgence? Can this be the design of God? Do not think so. Has He done all this merely to give you pleasure? Not so, God's work is like a net of many meshes, and these are all connected with each other. We are links of the same chain, and cannot move without moving others. We are members of one body, and God acts towards us with that fact in view. He does not bless the hand for the hand's sake, but for the sake of the whole body.

Well then, dear friend, you are saved that you may save, you are taught that you may teach, you are confirmed in the faith that you may confirm others, talents are allotted to you that you may turn them over and bring in heavenly usury for your Lord. Whatever you have is not yours to hoard for yourself, or to spend upon yourself, but that you may use it as a good steward of God. Who knows whether you are come to the kingdom which God has given you for such a time as this, when there is need of you and all that you have?

Consider, next, *at what a time it is that you have been thus advanced*. You have been instructed in the faith in a time when unbelief is rampant. What for? You have been confirmed in full assurance at a time when many are weak and trembling. What for? You have been entrusted with talent in a time when multitudes are perishing for lack of knowledge. What for? You are found in the church when valued brethren are dying or moving off. Why is this? You have wealth when many are starving. Why is this? You hold a high position when many master spirits are leading men into infidelity, or ritualism, or communism. Why are you placed where you are?

Brother, your inevitable answer must be that God has put you where you are for some good purpose, which purpose must be connected with His own glory, and with the extension of His kingdom in the world. If, however, you think it enough to have secured a fortune, let me ask you—do you think you are the proprietor of what you have amassed, or do you admit that you are a steward? If you are a steward, use not the goods entrusted to you for your own ends, but for your Master, for if you do not, you are a thief. Whenever a steward considers that the estate is his own property, and not his master's, he is a thief, and before long his master will deal with him and say, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Consider also, I pray you, *under what very special circumstances you have come where you are*. To you as an individual I distinctly speak, and to no one else. It was a very strange thing that Esther, who was the foster child of Mordecai, a humble Jew, should rise from lowly rank to be the queen of Persia. Out of all the women gathered from every province how singular that she should be chosen to be queen! Special Providence selected the Jewish maiden for the throne.

The like is true of each one of us now occupying a post of usefulness. David was taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, that he might be the shepherd of God's people Israel. I am marveling to find myself where I now am, are not you? How came you into your present pastorate, my dear brother in the ministry? How did you gain that comfortable position which you now occupy in society? How came you even to be in the church of God? Oh, if anybody had told yonder brother a few years ago that he would be here, he would have sworn at them, but here he is, sitting at the feet of Jesus, charmed to be His disciple.

Now, consider what a wonder of grace you are, what a singular favor it is that you are where you are. Should not these remarkable dealings of the Lord towards you bind you to the divine service? Many a man of business here today obtaining a satisfactory livelihood has a dozen times been within an inch of bankruptcy, and yet he has obtained help, and passed the rock in safety. Some of you have been well-nigh ruined several times, and yet you still have bread to eat and raiment to put on. It is a miracle in your eyes that you have not come to beggary. Let your special deliverances and memorable mercies be as the tongue of persuasion, constraining you to grateful service. Consider how great things the Lord has done for you, and let us not have to say, "Many times did he deliver them, but they soon forgot his works. They understood not his wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of His mercies."

Then I beg you to consider once more, *with what singular personal adaptations you are endowed for the work to which God has called you*. I believe you are endowed with special capacity for a certain

work, so that no one is so fitted for it as yourself, you are a key to a lock which no other key will fit so well. God has prepared you for the work for which you are appointed. Is it not written—"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work"? Each laborer for the Lord has his proper tools found him. God does not, like Pharaoh, require us to make bricks without straw, nor to fight without weapons, nor to build without a trowel. The Lord provides lamps, and oil, and wedding garments for all who are called to the Bridegroom's midnight banquet.

You, my brother, are equipped for such work as the Lord has appointed you, will you not at once get to your post? You say, "If I could preach, I would do it gladly." You would not preach worthily unless you are even now prepared to do other service for which you are fitted. You would be a disgrace to the pulpit if you are useless in the home circle. If God entrusts you with a single talent, and you do not use it, neither would you use ten talents, for he that is unfaithful in that which is least, would be unfaithful in that which is greatest. "But," says one, "I can hardly get out to public worship, I am a mother shut in at home with five or six little children." To you there is a little kingdom in your own household. No one can bring up those little ones for the Lord as well as you can. Your influence over them is as strong as it is tender.

Now, do not say, "Because I am not allowed to be a preaching woman, therefore I will not attend to the lowly care of my children." It is far better to train a little family for Jesus than to be attempting a work to which you are not called. Let each one of you feel that he has come to his own little kingdom for such a time as this. You and your work fit each other, God has joined you together, let no man put you asunder. Ask for more power from the Holy Spirit, and if there happens to be a tool which the Lord intends for you which hangs a little higher than your present reach, get the ladder of earnest endeavor and you will soon attain to it. Consider how you can improve yourself, give yourself to reading, study Scripture more, and use all helps towards increased knowledge and efficiency. If a further qualification be within your reach, be eager for it, and even the reaching after it may be as great a blessing to you as the talent itself.

III. Thirdly, ASPIRE.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Rise to the utmost possible height. Fulfill your calling to its loftiest degree. Not only do all that you are sure you can do, but aim at something which as yet is high up among the questions. Say to yourself, "Who knoweth?" That is what the ambitious man says when he aspires to be great.

When Louis Napoleon was shut up in the fortress of Ham, and everybody ridiculed his foolish attempts upon France, yet he said to himself, "Who knows? I am the nephew of my uncle, and may yet sit upon the imperial throne," and he did so before many years had passed. I have no desire to make any man ambitious after the poor thrones, and honors, and riches of this world, but I would fain make you all ardently ambitious to honor God and bless men. Who knows? Does anybody know what God may do by you? Does anybody know what capacities slumber within your bosom? I suggest the inquiry, and I will help you to an answer.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *Nobody knows to the contrary.* I cannot tell but what God may bless you to this entire nation. Nobody will dare to say that He cannot. I cannot tell but what God may bless you, my friend, to that part of London in which you live, even though you may be deeply conscious of its great needs, and of your own insufficiency. Who can tell what the Lord can or will do? Dear mother, who knows but what the Lord Jesus may bless you to all the members of your family, so that by your means all the little ones shall come to Him? Nobody has any right to speak to the contrary. Who knows but what God may bless you, dear teacher, to all your Sunday school class, so that you may meet them all in heaven? Nobody can declare that it shall not be so, therefore strive after it. The watchword is, "Aspire."

Further, *nobody knows the limit of the possibilities that surround any man—should God please to use him.* "Alas," cries one, "I am soon at the end of my powers." My dear brother, if you begin calculating how much there is in you by nature, and how much you can do of yourself, you may as well

end the inquiry by hearing our Lord's word—"Without me ye can do nothing." Though you be no better than a mere cipher, yet the Lord can make something of you. Set one before a cipher and it is ten directly. Let two or three noughts combine to serve the Lord, and if the Lord Jesus heads them these nothings become tens of thousands. Who knows what you can do? Shall the church ever say, "Here is a problem we cannot solve?" Bite your lip through rather than have it thought that you doubt the power of the Almighty. All things are possible to him that believes. You are able to take the land into possession, the Lord being your helper. Go up against even these entrenched Canaanites, the walls of whose cities reach to heaven, for you can drive them out. You seem in your own sight to be as grasshoppers when compared with the sons of Anak, but the Lord on high is mighty, and out of the weakest things He has ordained strength to His honor and glory.

Young man, I trust you have given your heart to the Lord, what are you going to do? You have come into some property unexpectedly, or you are promoted in a house of business—what is the meaning of it? "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" My talented brother should you not take your share in battling with present evils?

I believe that in dark times God is making lamps with which to remove the gloom. Martin Luther is sitting by his father's hearth in the forest when the Pope is selling his wicked indulgences, he will come out soon, and stop the crowing of the cock of the Romish Christ-denying Peter. John Calvin is quietly studying when false doctrine is most rife, and he will be heard of at Geneva. A young man is here this morning—I do not know whereabouts he is, but I pray the Lord to make this to be an ordination sermon to him, starting him on his life-work. I feel as if I were Samuel at Bethlehem, seeking for David, to anoint him with a horn of oil in the name of the Lord.

Some beloved brethren are here who have done a good deal, and the Lord has blessed them, but their work is heavy and their hearts are weary. By the anointing which has given you the kingdom, I trust that you will not be weary in well-doing. Pluck up courage, for a grand future is before you. "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Be content to be a living sacrifice. Say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish. I am content to give myself up for such a cause. Come life, come death, I am all his own, if I die in my Lord's work, I die content."

Further, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" *You do not yourself know.* I speak experientially, using myself as an instance in the work which God has enabled me to do. If it had been revealed to me that I should have enjoyed the opportunities which have fallen to my lot, I could never have believed it. If the Lord could use *me*, He can also use *you*. Only stand in a waiting posture, saying, "Here am I, send me!" and you shall see things which you dare not expect. If the curtain could be withdrawn, and you could behold the future, you would exclaim, "Is thy servant born of angels that he should attempt such things as these?"

I do not suppose Peter, James, and John had any inkling of what the Lord was going to do by them when they left their boats and nets at His call. John dreamed that one day he might sit on an earthly throne and his brother James on another, but this was not to be, yet they have obtained a nobler heritage. To each of us there is a share in the purposes of heaven, and this is a kingdom large enough. Who knows, brother or sister, whether you are put in your family to save your family? Who knows whether you are made to live in a back street to bless that street? Who knows whether you are set down in a forlorn district to raise that district? Who knows whether you are put into that nation to save that nation? Ay, put into the world in Christ's name to save the world? Aspire to great things for God.

IV. Our fourth word is—CONFIDE.

"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this, *be confident that you are safe.* If God has brought Esther to the throne that she may go in unto the king and save her people, go in, good Esther! Fear not the risk. Fast and pray your three days before you go, but be not dismayed. If the womanhood in you trembles in the prospect of a possible death, let confidence in God override your fears. Ahasuerus cannot kill you, you cannot die, he can refuse his golden scepter to all the princes of the empire, but not to you, for God has

placed you where you are, and ordained you for His purpose. Rest assured if He had meant to destroy you He would not have shown you such things as these. Fall back on His past mercy and be confident.

What is more, if God has a purpose to serve by a man, that man will live out his day and *accomplish the divine design*. The more resistance he experiences the more surely will his life-work be achieved. If all the devils in hell rose up at once against a true, devoted servant of God, who has a work to do, in the name of the Lord he would drive them away as smoke before the wind. David said, "They compass me about like bees, yea, they compass me about; but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them."

It is a bad day for anybody when he opposes himself to the manifest destiny of one of the Lord's commissioned ones. I fall back often on the grand truth of predestination, it is no sleepy doctrine to me. If God's decree so runs there is no altering, it, and if He has purposed it there is no defeating it. Heaven and earth shall sooner fail than the eternal purpose. Each chosen servant of God is like the word which called him, as the word of the Lord does not return unto Him void, but prospers in the thing whereto He has sent it, even so shall it be with every servant of the Most High.

A holy confidence in the divine purpose instead of making men grow stolid and idle may prove to be one of the mightiest impulses to the heroic life. Cromwell's Ironsides to a man believed in the everlasting purpose, therefore they were invincible, for no fear ever breathed upon them. Though the hosts of the tyrant may be innumerable, yet with the war cry, "The LORD of hosts is with us," we will ride forth conquering and to conquer.

Settle it in your mind that the Lord has called you to the work, and then advance without question or fear. Put your hand to the plough, and pause not. Do the work with your might. Do not stand asking how, do it as you can. Do not stand asking when, do it directly. Do not say, "But I am weak"—the Lord is strong. Do not say, "But I must devise methods." Do not concoct schemes or tarry to perfect your methods, fling yourself upon the work with all your might. Load your cannon with rough bits of rock or stones from the road if nothing better comes to hand, ram them in with plenty of powder, and apply the fire. When you have nothing else to hurl at the foe, place yourself in the gun. Believe me, no shot will be more effectual than the hurling of your whole being into the conflict.

There was a man who strove in the House of Commons for what he thought would be a great boon to seamen, but he could not prevail. At last he broke through all the rules of the house and acted like a fanatic, and when everybody saw that the man was so in earnest that he was ready to faint and die, they said, "We must do something," and it was done. An enthusiasm which overpowers you is likely to overpower others. Do not fail from want of fervor. Never mind if men think you are crazy. When you are overwhelmed yourself the flood of zeal will bear all opposition before it. When you become so fanatically insane as to be absorbed by a passion for the glory of God, the salvation of men, the spread of the truth, and the reclaiming of the fallen masses, there shall be about you the truest sanity, and the mightiest force.

May you feel such a passion concerning missions today. May you feel that the gospel must be preached to all nations. May you feel that impulse at this moment while we worship God by giving our contributions to His cause.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ESTHER 4, PSALM 116:12-19

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—972, 663, 116 (PART 2)

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